

# What can you do?

Contact your MLA and tell him or her exactly how the Economic Unit Policy hurts the poorest of the poor in New Brunswick. Tell others to do the same.

Support organizations that publicly fight these policies by writing and e-mailing letters to newspapers and radio. Phone local radio and television producers and reporters and ask them to cover the issue. Call phone in talk shows. State your opinion loud and clear!

Organize events in solidarity with the poor.

This pamphlet was produced by the Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization (FAPO), October 2002.

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# Welfare Recipients:

**And the Economic Unit Policy**  
**Can't live with them, can't live without them!**



Where in the World are the poorest of the poor prevented by their government from living together to make ends meet?

Not in Canada you say? Think again!

In New Brunswick, poor people are prevented from living together by a punitive "Economic Unit Policy" that makes an already difficult life even more impossible.

*An Economic Household is defined as two or more persons residing together who share the responsibilities of the household, and benefit economically from the sharing of food, shelter and/or facilities. When an Economic Household is determined to exist, HRD-NB will consider it one household, and therefore determine eligibility for only **one** assistance cheque.*

*HRD-NB determines economic households to exist even though there is no marital, familial, or conjugal relationship among the members of the household. This policy was developed in order to ensure we do not discriminate against people on the basis of gender, marital status, or sexual orientation. The determination of an economic household will often result in assistance being refused, cancelled, or decreased, depending on the particular circumstances.*

Source: <http://www.gnb.ca/0017/Policy%20Manual/POL-E/INDEX.HTM>

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# Welfare Recipients:

Can't live with them, can't live without them!



For years, organizations like the Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization (FAPO) have been openly critical of the Department of Family and Community Services “Economic Unit Policy”. We say the “Economic Unit Policy” is the biggest source of homelessness among the “poorest of the poor” - single unemployable and single employable men and women who receive \$264 per month in welfare benefits.

*“New Brunswick’s definition of economic unit, applied only to poor persons requiring public assistance, is a mean and counterproductive policy that should have been modified years ago. It discourages New Brunswickers from helping their kin or friends in need and it violates our values of interdependence and personal dignity.”*

*Simply sharing the same address is all that is needed for two adults to be considered an economic unit under the definition used by the Department of Family and Community Services for eligibility to social assistance.”*

*Source: Mary Lou Stirling, Advisory Council on the Status of Women, NB  
September 2002-10-18 <http://www.acswccf.nb.ca/english/economicunit.asp>*

Imagine being a single, unemployed man or woman and your only income is a measly welfare cheque of \$264 per month. That’s about \$8.80 a day – including rent.

If you’re one of the luckier welfare recipients and you have a cheap \$250 room in a slum housing unit in Fredericton, you can take \$8 right off the top of your \$8.80 per day. That leaves you with the grand total of 80 cents a day or 14 dollars to live on for the rest of the month. For others, there’s nothing left, in fact, they’re already in the hole because at the going rate of \$250 to \$350 per month, rooms in the slum sector cost more than their entire welfare cheque. (Don’t worry, the Department’s “Assistance Geared to Rent” policy makes sure that can’t happen either!)

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What would you do if you had to cut down on expenses? You would take in a roommate to help share the bills. But two welfare recipients can’t move in together to share their pathetic resources in New Brunswick. That’s because they would suffer such a severe economic penalty that to do so would be economic suicide!

The Economic Unit Policy of New Brunswick’s Family and Community Services Department says there can only be one cheque per “economic unit”. So if one welfare recipient tries to share a slum room with someone else on welfare, the two become one “economic unit”: One person is thus designated the “head” of the “economic unit” usually the person in whose name the room is rented. The rental contribution of the roommate is deducted from the cheque of the renter. The original renter therefore, can’t afford a roommate. Since neither person can afford the room they lose the address, and when you don’t have an address you don’t get a cheque.

The renter and roommate can’t afford to be the economic unit the Department classifies them as being because the threat is that if you live together one person will lose their cheque - so nobody does. Amazing how, in the language of “bureaucratese”, people can both exist and not exist at the same time.

Another way that the Economic Unit Policy creates homelessness is the “assistance geared to rent” policy. You cannot get assistance if the rent you pay is more than your welfare cheque. That means your assistance is determined by landlords and so-called “market forces” - not the needs of the client or the authority of the Department.

The discrimination and exploitation arising from these two policies, one the “Economic Unit” policy, and the other “Assistance Geared to Rent” policy and the abysmal social assistance rates that they buttress are devastating New Brunswickers . These policies are contrary to the rights afforded every other New Brunswicker and make no sense at all for the economic health of the province.

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